

HIV/AIDS Myths and Facts

With so much information out there about HIV/AIDS, it may be hard to tell what is true and what is not. Here we will discuss those myths to make sure you know the truth about how you get HIV, treatment available, and life for those diagnosed with HIV.

- X** What is a MYTH? A myth is untrue or false information.
- What is a FACT? A fact is true information that can be verified through a credible source.
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- X** **MYTH:** HIV or AIDS can be cured.
- FACT:** There is no cure for HIV/AIDS. Treatments are available, but they do not cure the disease itself.
- X** **MYTH:** "HIV/AIDS is a death sentence."
- FACT:** Currently, there are over 35 FDA approved medications to treat HIV/AIDS. These medications, primarily known as anti-retroviral therapy, allow HIV positive individuals to live a full and healthy life after diagnosis and early treatment.
- X** **MYTH:** "If I take birth control, I won't get HIV."
- FACT:** Birth control does not protect you against HIV. It is important to use protection when engaging in **any** type of sexual activity.
- X** **MYTH:** "Women who are HIV positive can't — and shouldn't — have babies."
- FACT:** There are a number of options for women who are HIV positive to have perfectly normal and healthy babies. HIV positive women who become pregnant are encouraged to speak with their doctor or nurse about the best treatment options available. Early prenatal care is important to reduce the likelihood of mother to child transmission.
- X** **MYTH:** "It's okay to have unprotected sex if you and your partner are both positive."
- FACT:** Different strains of HIV among partners can result in superinfection, which is when two strains combine and alter the virus. Use of a new condom for each sexual act along with medication adherence minimizes the chance of superinfection.
- X** **MYTH:** "I can't get HIV because I'm not gay/black/a drug user."
- FACT:** HIV affects people from all backgrounds regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.
- X** **MYTH:** "I can't get HIV because I'm in a monogamous relationship."
- FACT:** Getting HIV does not depend on one's relationship status, but rather measures taken in **any** relationship to protect yourself. It is important to engage in honest and open conversations about monogamy with your partner and get tested together.
- X** **MYTH:** My partner tested negative for HIV. That means we don't need to have safer sex.
- FACT:** Remember to always negotiate condom use with any partner and to get tested along with your partner to reduce the likelihood of transmitting HIV. The only way to know for sure is if you're both tested and engage in open/honest discussions about your relationship and STDs.

- ✗ MYTH:** Faithful and loving partners do not spread HIV.
- ✓ FACT:** People hold different views about what it means to be “faithful” and “loving,” so it is critical not to assume your definition is the same as your partner’s. It is important for you and your partner to get tested together and to engage in honest and open conversations about your relationship and what you expect from each other.
- ✗ MYTH:** When you’re on HIV therapy, you can’t transmit the virus to anyone else.
- ✓ FACT:** HIV treatment reduces the chance of passing HIV by 96%, but there is a 4% chance of transmission between an infected (virally suppressed) and uninfected partner.
- ✗ MYTH:** Since I only have oral sex, I’m not at risk for HIV/AIDS.
- ✓ FACT:** Although studies show you have a considerable lower risk of getting HIV through oral sex, there is still a possibility, especially if the receptive partner has had recent dental work or has open sores/wounds.
- ✗ MYTH:** I would know if a loved one had HIV by looking at them.
- ✓ FACT:** You cannot tell if someone has HIV by looking at them, people can be infected with HIV for up to 10 years or more and still show no symptoms.
- ✗ MYTH:** “I can’t get HIV if I have a STD.”
- ✓ FACT:** STDs including HIV have the same primary transmission method, so the same activities that place you at risk for STDs place you at risk for HIV. Having an STD also increases your chances of HIV infection because of breaks or tears in the genital tract lining or skin.
- ✓ FACT:** HIV **CANNOT** be spread through:
- Saliva, such as through kissing or sharing eating utensils
 - Hugging or shaking hands with someone who is HIV positive
 - Sharing exercise equipment or playing sports with an HIV positive person
 - Touching a toilet seat or doorknob handle after an HIV positive person
 - Drinking from a public water fountain

Always make sure your health information comes from a credible source such as the Georgia Department of Public Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or AIDS.gov.